

BROTHER TO SAINTS

A STORY FROM SAKHALIN

BY STEPHEN BONSAI

FOR long and weary hours I had stood upon the headland that jutted out far into the stormy seas. For hours, wet and chilled to the marrow by the cold spray that fell all about me, I strained my eyes to look through the banks of fog that rolled up on the coast. Suddenly there floated across the white wall of mist the shadow which a passing steamer cast. Above the roar of the waters I heard the shrill scream of a whistle; then the shadow faded gradually from view, and I knew that the steamer had passed on, not daring in such weather to enter the tortuous inlet. My Christmas dream was over, and I was called upon to face the stern reality of another month of waiting in snow-bound Sakhalin.

To some it will seem a small matter, when you have to spend your Christmas on the Siberian coast, enveloped in the fogs of the northern Pacific, whether the feast be spent in Vladivostok, the world city that is to be, but which still lacks inhabitants, or in the convict settlement on Sakhalin, where I now stood. The dream of Christmas which I had until now thought to realize came to me one evening as I sat behind the stockade. I had just heard that the wires across Asia, after many mishaps and many delays, had been opened from the Ural passes to the Pacific, from Vladivostok to St.

Petersburg, and my dream had been to send her a word of greeting that would travel, by the power of the electric spark, twelve thousand miles in a few hours, across the yellow wastes and the dark tundras of Siberia, over crowded Europe, where many voices are heard, and under the Atlantic to her home—to our home, from which I had wandered.

I knew that such a message as I could send under these circumstances would have to be very conventional and commonplace indeed to survive the many processes of transmission by overland wire and submarine cable that it would have to undergo. I knew it needs must be spelled out and puzzled over by many a Turcoman and beetle-browed Kalmuck before, on Christmas morning, some little blue-coated Mercury would carry it up the steps of her home, before it could reach my lady's boudoir, and compel, if only by the strategy of surprise, her eyes, and perhaps her thoughts, to rest for a fleeting moment upon the name of her servant in far-away Siberia.

But the dark shadow in the offing now faded out of sight altogether, and the whistle tooted ironically, "Why did you not think to write when first the leaves began to fall and the days grew short?" "Ah, then I did not think; I did not know. But now—" And the breakers

dashing up against the rock-bound coast seemed to say, "But now too late."

I was growing maudlin and not a little ashamed, which completely spoiled my delight in this unusual sensation of unreserved sentimentality, when suddenly I felt the heavy arm of my friend the police inspector upon my shoulder, and heard his gruff friendly voice: "Cheer up! Come and drive with me to the convict depot, and there perhaps you will realize that there are worse fates in store for men than to spend an unwilling month upon desolate Sakhalin."

In a few minutes—for the inspector had brought fast horses with him from a grass country on the mainland—we reached the depot, and soon, surrounded by a host of obsequious turnkeys, we were pacing down the corridors upon which the cells opened. The iron gratings of the doors were filled with curious faces as we passed. They presented the most varied assortment of the races and types of the human family that I have ever seen. Among them the Muscovites of the muzhik class were in an infinitely small minority. Every race of the conglomerate empire was, however, in evidence—Germans from the Baltic and yellow-haired Finns from the archduchy; there were Chinamen and Tartars, and Mohammedans too, represented by as widely different types as are the Albanians and the Persians. There were Turcomans and Ruthenians, Jews of many tribes, Poles, and Russians Great and Little. As we passed along the gallery the convicts would stand back from the grating, and drawing themselves up, say, or rather shout, in chorus, "We wish your lordships a good-evening," so we passed on until at the end of the corridor we came to the liberty-room, a larger and more comfortable galley, whose occupants were less strictly confined because they were time-expired men, or those who had been pardoned out, and were only awaiting the starting of the next convoy to go to their homes.

"There is a man here among these liberty-men from whom you and I might take a lesson in patience," said the inspector. "I confess that I, the chief ruler of the convicts, am not worthy to touch the latchet of his shoe. He came here thirty years ago, sentenced by mistake, and his life has gone in the time it has taken to correct this judicial error, and

now he will have to wait here for his freedom until the spring, as the convict convoys no longer travel in winter. Watch the man closely while I speak with him; it will do you good to have known him, as it has done me. The convicts call him the Brother to Saints, because for thirty years he has endured the stigma and borne up under the suffering which his unjust sentence entailed, and no man has heard pass his lips a word of anger against those who have robbed him of his liberty and of the best years of his life, nor yet one word of repining or of doubt but that in the end right would prevail, and God's justice be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I followed the inspector's eyes, and saw standing somewhat behind the other time-expired men a little man with a worn, weather-beaten face, a long white beard, and meek and inoffensive eyes that fell submissively to the floor when they met or crossed the gaze of another.

"Dimitri Ivanovitch," said the kindly police inspector, as we walked on past the liberty-room, "we shall expect you downstairs in the warden's house to take a cup of tea with your friends."

The time-expired man's face flushed as he answered: "You are too kind. I would be out of place there, little father. Your nobility, I shall stay here with the little brothers. We in the liberty-room are very grateful to you all for your kindness."

But a few minutes later he appeared in the custody of one of the wardens, and as it had now grown dark he sat down with us under the lamp by the hissing samovar, which filled the room with its cheerful spluttering noise.

My sympathy for this victim of a judicial error, or rather of the carelessness with which in former days administrative orders to transport people to Siberia were permitted to every petty judge, quite overpowered me, and for a long time we sat there in perfect silence in the dull light of the lantern and in front of the samovar, the inspector puffing away at his big-bowled pipe, and the prisoner on the threshold of freedom twitching his fingers nervously, and looking down with a weak smile upon the well-scrubbed and shining floor.

The embarrassing silence was interrupted by a turnkey, who came to the door and said, in a warning voice, "Di-

mitri Ivanovitch, the hour of liberty is past."

"Coming, coming, *sichass*, immediately. Your pardon," he added, turning to the inspector and to me.

"Sit still, Dimitri Ivanovitch. To-night you drink tea with me, and to-night you shall tell me the story of how you came to Sakhalin, and how you fared here before I came; for soon you will be leaving us for good and aye, Dimitri Ivanovitch."

"Willingly, little father," he began. "It was a sad story, but it ends so happily that all is well, and I should be ungrateful indeed did I not love to tell of the great kindness with which all men have treated me.

"I married young and without money, and soon found that, as we say in Russia, the days of the poor are long and full of toil, but their nights are short. However, I was young and enterprising, full of ambition and a desire for work, and I said I will go to the Eastern land, where money is cheap and labor prized and highly paid, and soon I will make a home in the new land and send for Paulovna; and she, good brave girl—she said she would wait.

"After some months' travelling I reached Irkutsk, and began to look for work. I found that I was not only handicapped by the fact that I knew no one (and in Irkutsk they have learned to be distant with strangers), but also from the unfortunate circumstance—and how unfortunate it was I really did not know until later—that in a fire which took place at an inn on the Great Moscow Road, from which I barely escaped with my life, I had lost all my papers of identification." For a moment he paused. His voice, which had been weak and quavering, now grew suddenly strong and full. I looked up with some surprise, and saw that his eyes were fixed in humble adoration upon the sacred ikon on the wall. "I confess most humbly," he said, "that there have been moments when I have despaired of His infinite goodness, when I have lost sight of the fact that His mercy endureth forever; but now the wrong has been righted, the great white Tsar has given me back my freedom. I am going home to Paulovna and to Holy Russia. My lack of faith has not been remembered against me, and God has shown His mercy and loving-

kindness even unto me—a miserable sinner." His lips moved for some moments in silent prayer; then he resumed his story:

"One day, just as the outlook grew brighter and I was, as I thought, on the point of getting work, I was arrested on the street and clapped into prison. They charged me with being an escaped convict. There was little evidence against me, and that was based upon mistaken identity; but I had no papers, and this was held as proof conclusive that I was either a convict, as was charged, or that I had sold my papers—as was frequently done—and so assisted in the escape of some convict or vagabond travelling without a pass."

"Those were the days," interjected the inspector, "before the accompanying photograph had become a necessary part of the passport, and, as Dimitri Ivanovitch points out, there were many abuses in the sale of papers, and where any one was detected in this malpractice, the punishment meted out was swift, sweeping, and severe."

"After a few days of inquiry the judge charged with the examination of my case, upon what evidence I never knew, found me guilty of the charge, and sentenced me to exile in Sakhalin for life, and I was sent on with the next convoy of convicts that passed through Irkutsk. I pleaded for a delay, for a revision, for but a little time to write to secure evidence that would make my innocence clear; but the probabilities were against me, I confess—and so I was sent on to Sakhalin.

"Once here, the authorities treated me kindly and listened to what I had to say. They promised to write my story to Russia, and to ask that my case might be reopened for examination. They soon saw that I was harmless and inoffensive, and would work without the whip of the guard to goad me on; so in a few months I was paroled with a companion, and together we were sent up the coast to pick sea-weed and lichens on the rocks when the tide was out. Under a larch-tree behind a great headland we built our cabin, and so the years of waiting began to go round—slowly at first, and then more swiftly.

"My comrade was a sad and a hopeless man. He had been sentenced to exile for life, and from his sentence there was no appeal. We spent our evenings together after the day's work was

done and the sacks of sea-weed gathered in, and though he but rarely opened his lips to say a word, there was comfort in his presence. Often at night, when the wind blew wildly against the headland and the larch-tree under which our cabin stood strained and tugged away at its roots, as a ship in the roadstead upon its anchor-chains, when the roar of the surf and the wild cries of the birds overhead filled me with terror, I would turn and listen to the regular breathing of my comrade, and then praise God that He had not quite deserted me, and so confidence in His infinite mercy never left me even in the darkest moments. I knew past all manner of doubting that in time my process would be revised and justice be done and my name cleared before all men.

"With every spring the hope of freedom that never forsook me grew strong, for it was in the spring that, according to our tickets of leave, we travelled down to Alexandrovsk to pass in review before the inspector of the convict colonies. How I trembled always when my turn came to pass before the inspector's eyes! Once, I remember, I thought to hear him say, while I was yet a great way off from where he stood, 'You are a free man, Dimitri Ivanovitch; your pardon has come.' I fell down on my knees. But my comrades raised me up, and then, as in a dream, I heard the inspector saying: 'As yet we have heard nothing, Dimitri Ivanovitch, in regard to the revision of your sentence. But I know the good people in St. Petersburg are examining into the matter. Only the ink-slingers—the *tchinovnik*—are slow. But we shall hear from them yet, and God's justice be done.' I had never given way to my feelings before, but this disappointment, this fall from the highest hopes to the deepest despair, was too much for me, so I stammered: 'Thank you, little father. I am sure that everything that can be done is being done to have my case reopened—only—it is hard!'

"'It is hard, little brother. But I believe you innocent, and that by the grace of the Blessed Trinity and the great white Tsar right in the end shall prevail!'

"That winter was the brightest I ever spent. The days were not dark, nor yet the nights cold. I was full of hope. Only the signs of spring were slow in coming, or so they seemed to me in my

fever of impatience. When I reached Alexandrovsk and took my place in the long sad line I could hardly stand, I trembled so with excitement. Then, when the door opened, a strange face appeared. The inspector who had been so kind was dead, and the new one knew nothing about my case, but he said he would notify me should any order come from St. Petersburg concerning me.

"I went home to the rocky point jutting far out into the sea that stormed and never was at rest. My comrade was waiting for me. He knew what I had expected to hear this day, and seeing me coming so sad and cast down, he threw his arms about me and covered my cheeks with kisses. Then he led the way out along the shingle beach to a rocky cove in the lee of the promontory. The cove ended in a great cave, which at high tide was filled with water. The walls of the cave were dry now, but as we stood there I could see that the waters were rising rapidly. He led me over the slippery ledge and into the cave.

"It was perhaps because we came so suddenly from the twilight outside into the darkness of the cave, for when Yryko took me by the arm and shouted wildly, 'Look! Look!' I could see nothing, only later, as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I made out the dim outline of a rude raft built of logs and rough ship timbers.

"He passed his hands lovingly over the rough logs. In his eyes no fairer ship had ever been launched. 'You remember the day a month ago,' he began, 'when we sat upon the headland and watched the timbers as they were washed ashore from a wreck up the coast? As I listened to the grinding noise they made as they were tossed against the great rocks, I seemed to hear a voice saying: "Men have died that you might live, that you may escape from your living death. Shall these men have died—shall the sacrifice have been made in vain?" From that moment I planned my escape. I embraced the God-given opportunity. Since then, while you slept, I have passed every night upon the beach scouring the coast for the Heaven-sent timbers that were cast up—not idly—by the sea. Dimitri Ivanovitch, upon one of the timbers, a broken mast, I found lashed the body of a dead man. Had it not been for the coil of rope that was wound about

his torn body I could never have finished my raft; I worked alone, saying nothing to you, for I knew that as long as you cherished hope of pardon you would not attempt to escape with me; but now come, Dimitri Ivanovitch. Now I ask you to go with me. Why wait longer for miracles to happen? Heaven is high above us, and the great white Tsar is far away from Sakhalin.' He lowered his voice, as though even here in this desolate spot he feared that the shadows might listen, and the great waves, calling out as they swept over the rocks past the point, repeat his words and send them echoing down the rock-bound coast. 'The tide is rising every minute,' he continued, with ever-growing excitement; 'within an hour the raft will float. I have biscuits and water and sea-weed that will keep us alive for two weeks; but long before then, with the currents that prevail, we shall have reached the shallow waters and the islands where the sealers go, and once there we are sure to be picked up by an American vessel; and then, Dimitri Ivanovitch—then—do you understand?—liberty is ours.'

"The man was mad, it seemed to me. He had been driven to madness by all the loneliness and solitude in which we lived. The sea that tumbled in mighty breakers upon the beach, and hammered away upon the granite ramparts of the coast with the roar of artillery, had no fears for him. Upon that crazy craft he was willing to embark, with only the hope of liberty and freedom to buoy him up and sustain him. He came and kissed me on both cheeks, as had grown to be our custom during the long years of exile that we had spent together.

"Now that you must or should give up all hope of a reprieve—now, Dimitri Ivanovitch, my brother—now that we stand upon the same footing, I can and do ask you to attempt the escape with me. You, my little brother, will not let me go to freedom or to death alone. Come!"

"Seeing that I hesitated, he placed his arms about my neck and kissed me again upon each cheek.

"Come, my little brother, the ear of the great white Tsar is turned far away from Sakhalin; the heavens are high, but our voices have reached there, and He has willed it that the souls which sailed upon that ship be lost that you and I might be saved. Come, we have been comrades,

we have been brother and sister, we have been all in all to each other for five dark, gray years of exile, Dimitri Ivanovitch, and can you now—will you now let me go to liberty or to my death alone?"

"It was a terrible temptation, and it found me in a moment when I was weak, when from high hope I had fallen into the depths of despair. My voice failed me; my knees trembled. I realized what the loneliness of the rock-bound coast would be when he was gone, when the damp clammy mists of the evening rolled in from the sea and enveloped the larch-tree and our cabin on the point as with a pall. Then I turned and looked out upon the sea. There the waves were leaping high in the air like hungry wolves eager for their prey, and into this wild waste of waters I was to let Yryko go, and go alone!

"I cannot, I will not go.' At last I found the voice to plead, to protest. 'My flight would be a confession of guilt; it would be the negation of all I have lived and prayed and worked for since my sentence was passed. I love you very dearly; I shall miss you every moment; I pray that St. Cyril may accompany you, that God may have you in His holy keeping; but go? I cannot go with you.'

"While we talked the rising tide came in ever stronger, and the muttering waters flowed into the cave more freely and covered the rocky ledge under our feet.

"Then I will go alone, Dimitri Ivanovitch; and if I find death where I seek freedom, is not death liberty?"

"For all answer the warm tears coursed down my cheeks, which for long had never been wet with the gentle dews of sorrow.

"Together in silence we now awaited the things that were to come. At first the waters only beat in little wavelets against the heavy timbers of the raft, with no more power to move them than had the great waves which beat outside to stir the granite pillars of the promontory from their foundations. Quickly and ever quicker the tide rose, and suddenly the waves came rolling into the cave with a triumphant sweep. With the force of their onward rush they raised the ends of the great raft from the ground, and as they receded let them fall again with a great crash upon the rocky floor. As the



"IT WAS A SAD STORY."

waves swept in, swifter and more full-bodied, the rise and the fall of the raft became less sharp, its subsidence less marked, and, as suddenly as it had begun, the smashing, grinding noise of the timbers upon the rocky ledge ceased, and the raft was afloat.

"Yryko's face was now all aglow with excitement. He sprang upon the timbers, which were adrift. He now paid less attention to me than he did to the sharp, jagged rocks which protruded over and above the rising waters, guarded the entrance to the cave, and were full of menace for his crazy raft. He grasped the planks he had fashioned into oars, and I could hear his heart beat with excitement as he gripped them and began to shove his raft out towards the open waters. It was past midnight, and the moon had waned and cast but a pallid light upon the dark seas. I helped him to avoid the jagged rocks, and put my shoulder to the timbers whenever they strand-

ed upon the ledge, but he paid no more attention to me than if I had not been there. It seemed to me that the moment his raft had floated and escape became a possibility, I had passed out of his life and thought altogether.

"His eyes flashed, his face was flushed with the hope of freedom; and so it was, with his eyes straining to see through the darkness, that he passed out of the shoal water and into the deep and open sea beyond, and was lost to my sight forever.

"All through the night I sat under the larch-tree upon the promontory where we had so often sat and dreamed together. All through the darkness of that night I could follow the course of his raft—a little fleck of shining light which stood out against and shone in the darkness that overspread the sea. In a few hours the little speck was swallowed up in the brightness of the dawn, and I saw him and I heard of him no more. I never

learned what fortune befell him upon his voyage, but long since I felt. I am sure, that in one way or another, in the way that was best, the shackles that bound him have been broken and cast off, and that he lives—and is free.

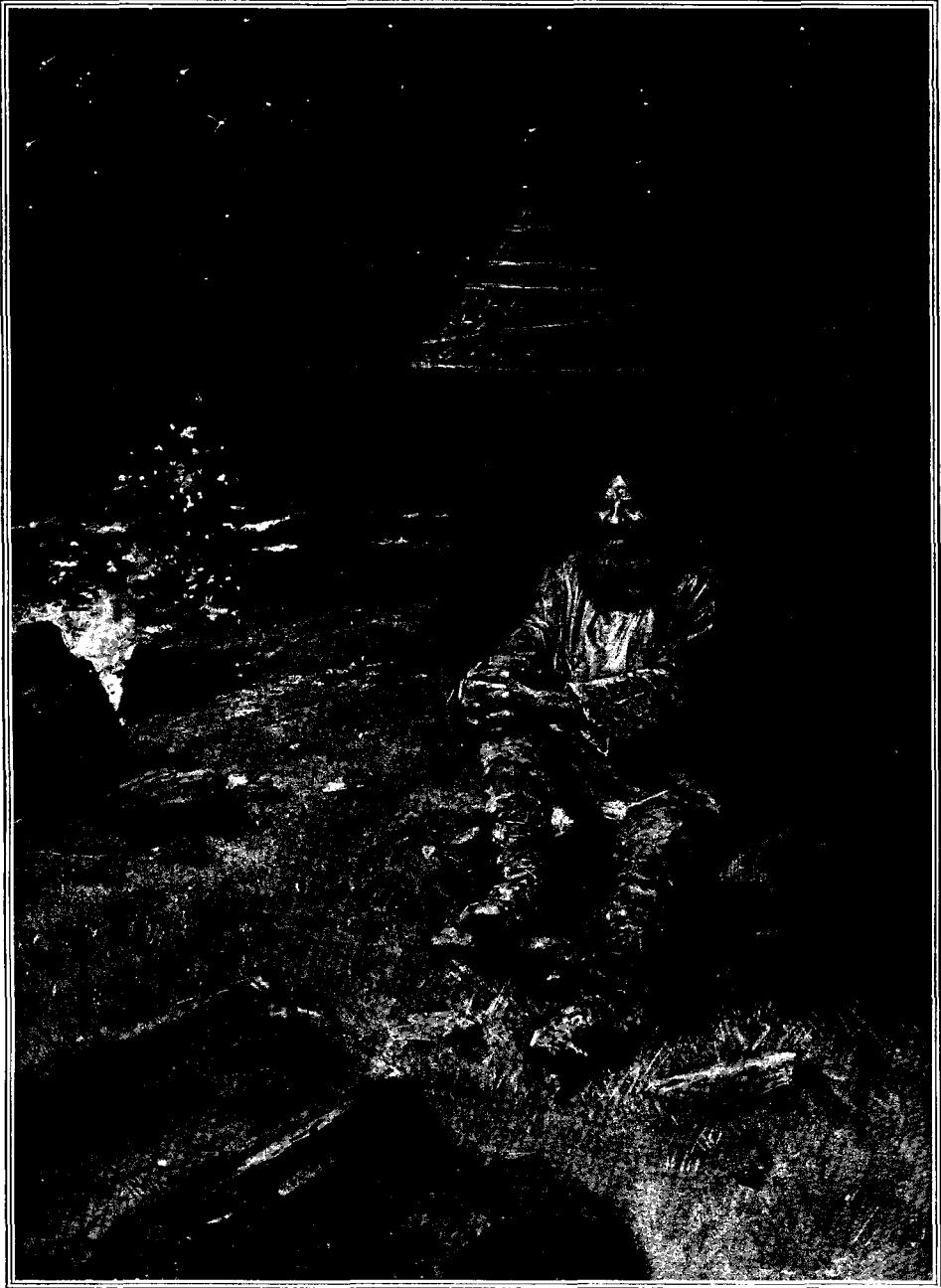
"For many nights I sat under the larch-tree and looked out anxiously across the sea, which was now blown up by a northern gale into great green billows. By day I did not work, and at night I feared to return to the lonely cabin. As I sat in the sand I would now and again fall asleep, only to be awakened by a cry that seemed to come to me on the wind from across the restless sea; but when I sprang to my feet and strained my eyes to look across the dancing waves, I could hear nothing, and the only answer that came to my cries for my comrade was the shrill, discordant voices of the sea-gulls as they sailed over the headland and dived deep down into the crests of the curling waves.

"The sea-weed was washed in at my feet, but I never stooped to pick it up. I had no thought for the morrow; I lived in the yesterday that I tried to recall. When the farmer of the coast convicts came by he would give me no food because I had been idle. I told him that my comrade had been drowned while swimming off the beach; that I had not had the heart to work; but he would leave me no food because I had been idle, and rode away muttering angrily that he would report me to the inspector, and have me sent back to Alexandrovsk to work under the eyes of the overseer. For the next month I worked without resting. I lived upon the sea-weed, which I boiled, and when the farmer came back he was well pleased, for I had twenty sacks of the sea-weed, which he sold at great profit to the Chinese, who season their rice with it. So now he gave me food again. I soon fell into my accustomed life, gathering the weed when the tide was low, and spreading it out to dry upon the rocks when the sun was hot. Little father, you can grow accustomed to anything in life; it is simply a question of patience and the passing of a little time. Soon even I could look out across the sea without straining my eyes to see the face, the familiar form, of the friend who had disappeared there in my very sight.

"In the years that followed I lived as best I might. By day I clambered over

the slippery rocks and through the driving rains that beat upon our gray coast, in search of the weed cast up by the waters upon which I lived. At night I sat alone until sleep and weariness overcame me, and I no longer heard the deafening roar of the surf and the mocking cries of the gulls. Sometimes as I sat in my cabin I would take a chunk of coal and roughly draw upon the wall the face of some one I had known in the happier, the unrestrained days of my life, and I would talk to him until I fell asleep. But I was very lonely, and hungry for the sound of a human voice; still there came no news of the revision of my sentence, and I was indeed very glad when one day the inspector sent me a comrade. This man had committed a great crime; but yet it was done in the heat of anger, and the provocation was great. He was very lovable, and we lived in perfect harmony for many months. But with time Stash, my little brother, grew restless. How was I to be deceived? I knew so well the signs of that desire to get away from lonely Sakhalin. For the first few months he had been so overjoyed to escape from the picketed stockade, the crowds of convicts under guard with whom he had worked the first five years of his sentence, that to him the lonely strand upon which we lived had seemed a perfect paradise. Soon there came a change. With cold fear at my heart I watched him now as hour after hour he walked along the cliffs studying with rapt gaze the seas as they rose and fell, watching the dancing waves and the scurrying clouds, and following with steady, mournful eyes the flight of the wild-geese, as with hoarse cries they passed overhead, winging their way to the mainland.

"Still, of the subject which, as I feared, and with reason, was uppermost in his heart he said not a word, and when the winter came I breathed more freely. Now for six months at least, while the sea and the land were under the thrall of the arctic winter, he would, he could, make no attempt to escape. I still knew little of the strength of that craving for liberty, or what a man will not hazard for freedom when all hope of relief by other means and from other sources is at an end. And though I saw the working of this desire in men as different as were Yryko and Stash, I could not altogether understand the irresistible strength and



"ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT I SAT UNDER THE LARCH-TREE AND LOOKED."

power of it, because my position was altogether so different. I could not grasp such a grim resolution because, though my hoped-for freedom was often and ever deferred, yet with each spring, when the sun shone and the hills which had been so long white with snow grew suddenly green, and the boats came over from the mainland with the orders and the sentences, then, when the sap ran and the trees leaved, my faith was renewed, and a new strength sprang up in my bosom. With this new year, with this spring, my pardon will come, I thought, and even when time after time my hopes were dashed to the ground, with each succeeding spring they would grow strong again.

"It was a still, cold night. The wind blew strongly, not in the usual gusts, but steadily from the north. The night was clear and starlit, and when, before going to bed upon our Chinese stove, I opened the door of our cabin, the air was deadly cold, and so chilled my lungs that I could hardly breathe. When I wrapped the skins around me and lay down, I noticed that Stash lay with his eyes wide open, and seemed to be laboring under some strong excitement which he sought to suppress, or at all events to restrain, and so conceal from me. I awoke early, very early in the morning, and I surprised him still lying with his eyes propped wide open, as they had been when sleep came to me, only now they wore an expression of extreme weariness. For a moment, as though undecided what to do, he gazed wildly at me, then suddenly crossing himself, he sprang up and rushed to the door. He was greatly agitated, and a moment later, when a great shout of gladness came back to me, I thought for an instant that he had seen the courier from Alexandrovsk coming along the cliffs, and that he had fondly imagined him to be the bearer of good news—a pardon, perhaps, for him or for me, perhaps for both of us. Without waiting to get into my bear-skin I rushed to the door.

"Hasten, Dimitri Ivanovitch! Hasten!" he cried as he saw me coming, and his voice sounded strangely unfamiliar. It was as though another man had spoken, a new voice had sounded through the stillness of the solitude in which we had lived so long together.

"Dazed and bewildered, I looked about

me. I rubbed my eyes, yet I could see no one there—no one save Stash. He grasped me by the arm, and pointed toward the sea.

"Look!" he shouted. "We have a pardon signed by One who is greater than the great white Tsar! Even He who bade the waters be still, the waves and winds subside. Look, Dimitri Ivanovitch! the sea is bridged with ice from shore to shore!"

"For a moment I stood transfixed with astonishment at the sight which met my eyes. Great fields of ice had been swept down the coast by the north wind, and when, toward morning, the wind had died away, the ice lay there as a weight upon the waters, and soon became frozen to the shores. It was a beautiful sight. The waves, it seemed, had been frozen as they rolled. There were the ridges and the hollows; there were the white-caps where the crest of the waves had broken into spray; there were the dark shining spaces between the rush of the billows, clear as crystal, dark and cold as death. Here and there I still seemed to see the broad expanse of the sea; only it was strangely at rest; the ever rising and falling, the restless waves, were still. The sea was a captive which moaned and groaned, but yet could not break through the burden of ice that had been placed upon its throbbing bosom.

"Stash had grown to be a deeply religious man. He had been converted by the good Bishop of Blagovechensk, who, when he came upon his pastoral visit to Alexandrovsk, had slept and eaten with the convicts in the stockade. It was he who placed his arms about Stash and said, 'My brother in sin, my brother redeemed in Christ.' Before he had spoken to me, the moment I caught sight of his flaming eyes. I knew the wild purpose, the desperate hope of freedom, that quickened his whole being.

"I have long prayed for this," he said, "and now He has listened to my prayers. Dimitri Ivanovitch, He has builded a bridge across the seas for us even as He did for the despoiled Egyptians. 'Tis but fifty miles across the floating fields of ice to the mainland, and once there, in the pine forests there live many renegades and *brobdyags*—those who have tasted the salt of prison bread and carried the weight of chains. They surely will not let us hunger or thirst; and, Dimitri,



"AND SO HE STARTED OUT ACROSS THE FROZEN SEA."

from the Primorsk there lead many roads into the outer and the freer world; while from here, this island of the dead uncounted souls, there was not one until He in His infinite mercy was pleased to build a bridge for us to pass over.'

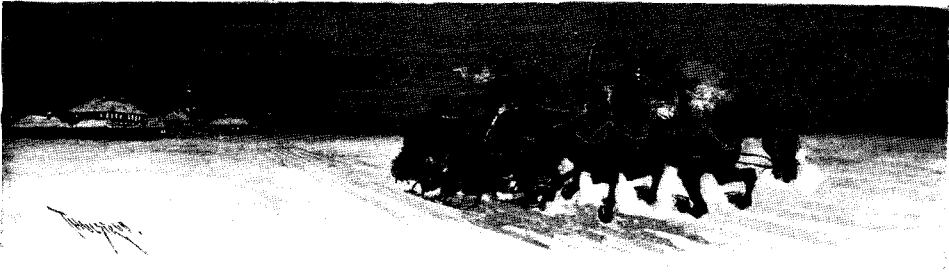
"'But, Stash, my brother, my *kohanek*, have you no fear? Have you not heard of the Gilyaks, the cruel 'long-hairs,' the heathen race who guard the coast, who in winter cut down the refugees and eat their flesh? Oh, think, my brother, before it is too late to turn back; the floating field of ice may at any moment be blown adrift, and then, Stash, my *kohanek*, my comrade, then, who then can save you?'

"Stash looked at me a moment with great sadness. 'You, Dimitri Ivanovitch, have no faith in the miracle which He has wrought before our very eyes, or trust in the covenant which He has made

with us. May God have mercy on your soul, Dimitri Ivanovitch!'

"Then he rushed madly down the slope of the headland, and when he came to the shore, where the ice was being ground to powder against the rocky barriers of the coast, he gave a great spring, making the sign of the cross as he left the land, and so he started out across the frozen sea.

"I watched him for a long time—until he disappeared behind the veil of the snow that now began to fall softly. I watched him while hot tears ran down and froze upon my cheeks. Then I thought to hear his voice crying out to me for help, and I too raced down the headland and sprang out upon the ice, which now had begun again to throb and pulsate with the heartbeat of the sea. I found his trail, and followed it, but the snowflakes flew faster and faster, and soon his footprints were filled



"SOON WE WERE SKIMMING OVER THE CRUST OF THE SNOW."

and vanished, and I could follow him no longer, and so I returned again to the lonely cabin under the larch-tree. Toward morning the wind sprang up again, and with a great booming sound the floating field of ice was blown from its moorings and swept before the gale toward the south. I never heard whether Stash reached the shore and escaped the 'long-hairs,' or whether he was swallowed up by the sea. Often in the evenings, when the wind is blowing a gale down the coast, I hear his voice, and I know that, whatever happened, whatever may have befallen him, now he is free.

"Since then, and for five long winters, I have lived alone with my thoughts, my memories, and my hopes. Every spring I travelled down the coast to Alexandrovsk, and every spring they told me: 'There is no news of your appeal, Dimitri Ivanovitch, but perhaps your pardon may come next year. Good people are interested in your case, are ever working in your favor, and the great white Tsar is merciful to his children.' This year my hopes were realized, as I knew and never doubted that they would be. And now the Tsar has given back to me all that was taken by a mistake—that it was human to make. He has given back to me liberty and my good name, and soon I shall be far away from Sakhalin, and with those I love in our holy Russia."

The kindly inspector put his hand on my shoulder; there were tears in his eyes and a tremor in his voice as he whispered to me: "But even the great white Tsar cannot give him back the years of his life that are gone. May he never live to realize that they are gone past recall!"

Down the corridor we could hear the heavy tread of the turnkeys as, with clank-

ing keys, they came, closing and double-locking the doors of the galleries for the night. With a sudden impulse, as the old man rose to return to his cell, the inspector threw his arms about him and kissed him upon either cheek. "You are a brother to the saints, Dimitri Ivanovitch. May your life be happy; may He in the end receive you into that goodly fellowship of those who, though sorely tried and long-suffering, never lost faith in His infinite goodness and mercy!"

As we wrapped our furs about us and started for the door, Dimitri Ivanovitch turned, and said to me: "It will be a cold drive to the settlement, little brother. Be careful of the cold air; put straw in your boots, and then you will never be frost-bitten."

The troïca was ready, and soon we were skimming over the crust of the snow, with the mad horses panting like engines, and with great streams of hot breath as of steam issuing from their nostrils.

"His life has been spent in correcting a mistake, and as yet he does not know that while he labored the prize for which he fought was melting and dwindling with the passing of each day. Was there ever such a tragedy? Not even the great white Tsar can turn back the hand of time and give to his serf one minute of one hour of yesterday."

"How could such a mistake that has cost him thirty years of his life have happened?"

"Well, you see, the difficulty was," began the inspector, whose professional, in distinction from his human, interest was aroused by my question, "for many years we could not find his wife. When Dimitri Ivanovitch was exiled to Sakhalin he was also deprived of his civil rights. Consequently, according to the

law, and without taking any further legal steps, his wife was divorced. She married again—in fact, several times, and rather informally. Her evidence was absolutely necessary to confirm Dimitri Ivanovitch's story, and only after many years we located her near Perm. She had just been expelled from the Mir or community in which she lived for constant drunkenness and vagrancy. The inspector who looked over her papers fortunately recognized her name as that of a woman who was wanted, and so the revision of sentence was secured. What a world it is! Dimitri

Ivanovitch's pardon has come too late, or else it has come too soon! Perhaps, after all, he may die before, as a broken-down old man, he crosses the Urals, over which he first came in search of fortune in the springtime of his life."

Now the lights of the settlement flashed up with a blinding glare out of the darkness through which the shaggy horses rushed with headlong speed.

"By all the saints, it is cold! My wife is making a grog american to-night in your honor. I hope there will be a lot of rum in that grog american."